

Honoring America's Veterans

Written by Mike Honda

Monday, 10 November 2008 19:00

Veterans Day is an occasion to honor the service and sacrifices our nation's veterans have made, a sacrifice which I remind myself of every day. We all owe a great debt to our American military service members, both active duty and veterans. Just as they have made incredible sacrifices for our nation, so must our country fulfill its responsibilities to them.

The 110 th Congress has been committed to ensuring that our nation leaves no veteran behind. Instead of endorsing President Bush's inadequate budget request for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), this year the Congress enacted historic funding increases for the VA. The Fiscal Year 2009 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill halts fee increases for veterans' health care that President Bush proposed, which will ensure that our veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan receive the quality health care and benefits that they have earned.

Additionally, earlier this year, I was extremely proud to support a New GI Bill for the 21 st Century, which restores the promise of a full, four-year college scholarship to veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars to help make them part of an economic recovery like the veterans of World War II. Investing in the education of our veterans is not just a smart policy—it is what we owe them.

This Veterans Day, I would like to applaud Darren Yafai, a Gilroy High School teacher, and his students for their tremendous efforts to keep the stories of our veterans alive. Darren and 165 of his students at GHS spent several months documenting the brave stories of 26 men and women who lived through World War II. Each exceptional "Story of Service" they recorded helps to preserve our history for generations to come. As the World War II generation ages, it is more important than ever to preserve and cherish these stories. Darren and his students will be honored as the Stories of Service teacher and school of the year at ceremonies in Washington, DC and New York City. As a former schoolteacher, I know the importance of teaching and preserving history with our students, and congratulate Darren and the students of Gilroy High School for their remarkable work.

One group of World War II veterans whose story is too often forgotten is the Filipino soldiers who fought under the American flag. I have worked arduously to make sure these 250,000 Filipino soldiers, who were called into service by President Roosevelt, receive the benefits they deserve. Sixty one years ago, Congress broke a promise by stripping these Filipino World War II soldiers of U.S. veteran's status. The passage of the Rescission Acts of 1946 robbed these brave men of their veterans' benefits despite their courageous service in defending the

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Philippine Islands and aiding the US military. These World War II heroes are in the twilight of their lives, with only about 22,000 of the original 250,000 Filipino soldiers still living. In order to right this injustice and support our veterans, I have been working with my colleagues to fight to provide benefits promised to these veterans.

Our nation's veterans have a champion in President-elect Barack Obama, who I am confident will support policies that fully meet the needs of our nation's active duty military servicemembers and veterans. This begins by making much needed improvements to modernize the VA, improving healthcare for veterans, reducing the number of homeless veterans living on the streets, and providing mental health treatment for returning Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans who have combat-related psychological injuries. President-elect Obama has a strong record of helping our heroes, and I know he will continue to do so over the next four years.

I also look forward to working with the incoming Members of Congress who have served our country in uniform proudly. These veterans continue their record of public service, and I am proud to have the opportunity to work with them in the 111 th Congress.

As a member of the House Appropriations Committee, you can be sure that I will continue to work to see that healthcare and benefits for our nation's veterans are adequately funded. Congress must not, and cannot, shortchange the brave men and women who put their lives at risk to defend our country.